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Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845 (Gender and American Culture)

Catherine A. Brekus

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Margaret Meuse Clay, who barely escaped a public whipping in the 1760s for preaching without a license; "Old Elizabeth," an ex-slave who courageously traveled to the South to preach against slavery in the early nineteenth century; Harriet Livermore, who spoke in front of Congress four times between 1827 and 1844--these are just a few of the extraordinary women profiled in this, the first comprehensive history of female preaching in early America.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, Catherine Brekus examines the lives of more than a hundred female preachers--both white and African American--who crisscrossed the country between 1740 and 1845. Outspoken, visionary, and sometimes contentious, these women stepped into the pulpit long before twentieth-century battles over female ordination began. They were charismatic, popular preachers, who spoke to hundreds and even thousands of people at camp and revival meetings, and yet with but a few notable exceptions--such as Sojourner Truth--these women have essentially vanished from our history. Recovering their stories, Brekus shows, forces us to rethink many of our common assumptions about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American culture.

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